critical digest

Vol. III No. 9 October 30, 1950
The Weekly That Keeps You Fully Informed of the Current Critical Bway.Scene

New York Opening This Week

Hilda Crane-Coronet, 11/1/50. Samson Raphaelson's new play stars Jessica Tandy and features Beulah Bondi, Frank Sundstrom, John Alexander and Evelyn Varden. Produced by Arthur Schwartz, directed by Hume Cronyn.

Daily Reviewers Rate the Plays

Mrs. Warren's Profession-Bleecker Street Playhouse, 10/25/50. Estelle Winwood and George Bernard Shaw shared honors and blame in first production of Theatre Venture. The former won support of critics of Times and Women's Wear, while critics of Compass, Post and Journal American thought the Shaw play still remains fresh. Watts, Post, thinks it is the best and freshest play of the new season. Louisa Horton was saluted for her supporting role. Dissenters thought script was shopworn and dull. Chapman, News, was annoyed that the professional critics were invited to an amateur production. Others commented on the poor acting by the rest of the cast.

The Curious Savage-Martin Beck, 10/24/50. Split decision greeted John Patrick's comedy of life in a madhouse. Five "pros", four "cons" and two "so-so" make up the daily file. Critics of News, Compass, Post, World Telegram and Sun, and the Newark News took the play at face value. They assumed author was trying to do nothing more than entertain. But critics of Times, Herald Tribune, Journal American and Brooklyn Eagle not only thought the play was unfunny, they considered it in very bad taste. Most praised performance of Lillian Gish, several billing it as the best performance in her career. Direction by Peter Glenville for the Theatre Guild was called "perfect" or "morbid".

Weekly Critics View the Shows -- additional digests on back page

Burning Bright-Broadhurst, 10/18/50. Weekly critics, with the exception of Hobe, Variety, found little poetry in symbolic "drama novelette" by John Steinbeck. While most praised fine acting by Kent Smith, Barbara Bel Geddes, Howard da Silva and Martin Brooks, they noted that many of the sticky poetic lines embarrassed both the players and the audience. Lardner, New Yorker, suggested the author should have kept the theme between book covers. Marshall, Nation, was puzzled about the meaning of the title.

Legend of Sarah-Fulton, 10/9/50. Crisler, Christian Science Monitor, enjoyed comedy by James Gow and Arnaud D'Usseau. But George Jean Nathan could find nothing humorous or interesting. He questioned why the leading actress played to a theatre audience as if it were a movie camera.

Call Me Madam-Imperial, 10/12/50. Add two more favorable votes for Ethel Merman's performance in the Irving Berlin musical. George Jean Nathan liked show, but admitted it wasn't entirely a honey. He thought it was more like synthetic guava jelly. Critic is fed up with Margaret Truman jokes. Christian Science Monitor critic also commented that entire show was enjoyable thanks to La Merman.

News & Notes

All first nighters, including drama critics, will pay for ANTA Playhouse openings...CBS TV Toast of Town to continue presenting scenes from Broadway plays... Sixth edition of Theatre World published by Greenberg...Billboard to switch to newspaper format...Helen Hayes put in eight hour day as ANTA president.

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' A Key to NYC Criticism At A Glance '

Shows are rated as to how the critics liked them, not if they think they will be hits. "So-So" means the critic did not state directly if he recommended the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening.

1. NY Times
2. NY Herald Tribune
3. NY News
4. NY Mirror
5. NY Compass (PM, Star)
6. NY Post
7. NY Sun (Morehouse)
8. NY Journal American
9. NY World-Telegram & Sun
10. Brooklyn Eagle
11. Newark News
12. Women's Wear Daily
13. Daily Worker
14. Wall Street Journal
15. Journal of Commerce
16. George Jean Nathan
17. Morning Telegraph
18. Variety
19. Billboard
20. Theatre Arts
21. Catholic World
22. Commonweal
23. Cue
24. Chr.Sci.Monitor
25. Sat.Review Lit.
26. Newsweek
27. Time
28. Nation
29. New Republic
30. New Yorker

Affairs of State-Royale, 9/25/50. Pro: 10 votes Con: 1-6-7-10-11-12-14-16-22-24-26-27-29.

Black Chiffon-48th St.Theatre, 9/27/50. Pro: 1-4-5-6-8-9-10-11-12-15-16-17-18-19-23-24-26-28-30. Con: 2-3-14-22-27-29.

Burning Bright-Broadhurst-10/18/50. Pro: 4-5-11-12. Con: 1-2-3-6-8-9-10.

Call Me Madam-Imperial, 10/12/50. Pro: 1-2-4-5-6-7-8-9-10-11-12-18-23-26-27-30 Con: 28. So-So: 3.

The Cocktail Party-Miller, 1/2/50. Pro: 21.votes. Con: 1-9-13-14-22-25-29. So-So: 16-30.

The Consul-Barrymore, 3/15/50. Pro: 27 votes. Con: 22. So-So: 6-29.

Daphne Laureola-Music Box, 9/18/50. Pro: 15 votes. Con: 1-4-6-7-9-13-16-22-27-30. So-So: 2.

Death of a Salesman-Morosco, 2/10/49. Pro: 28 votes. Con: 29. So-So: 27.

Gentlemen Prefer Blondes-Ziegfeld, 12/8/49. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 6-21-28.

The Gioconda Smile-Lyceum, 10/7/50. Con: 15 votes. Pro: 3-9-10-11-12-14-15-28.

The Happy Time-Plymouth, 1/24/50. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 5-6-7-20-26-27-28-30.

Legend of Sarah-Fulton, 10/11/50. Pro: 10-11-19. Con: 1-2-3-4-5-5-6-7-10-12-18 23-26-27-28-30.

Kiss Me Kate-Shubert, 12.31.48. Pro: 28 votes. Con: 29. None: 28.

The Member of the Wedding-Empire, 1/5/50. Pro: 26 votes. Con: 16. So-So: 2-27-30

Mister Roberts-Alvin, 2/13/48. Pro: 24 votes. Con: 21-24. So-So: 13-16-17.

Pardon Our French-Broadway, 10/5/50. Pro: 10-11-12-15-18. Con: 2-3-4-6-7-14-16 19-23-26-27-30. So-So: 1-5-8-9-

Peep Show-Winter Garden, 6/28/50. Pro: 4-5-6-7-8-10-11-15-17-19-23. Con: 1-2-12 16-20-26-27-28-29-30. So-So: 3-14-18.

Peter Pan-St. James-4/24/50. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 8-13-16-30. So-So: 6-7-14-19.

Season in the Sun-Cort, 9/28/50. Pro: 19 votes. Con: 10-12-24-28. So-So: 11.

South Pacific-Majestic, 4/8/49. Pro: 19 votes. Con: 27. So-So: 23.

Tickets Please-Coronet, 4/27/50. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 11-16-27-30. So-So: 26.

' Green Room Department '

MAYORS & THEATRE...Broadway theatre does not reach the general public. The city should subsidize some program of adult education using theatre. Paul Ross and Edward Corsi expressed these opinions at Drama Desk Luncheon with the two mayoralty candidates. They also endorsed the Quinn Bill, which provides for new theatre construction. Both promised, if elected, to adopt the suggestion of providing Equity shows in the public parks and schools. The other two mayoralty candidates invited did not appear.

PRO REVIEWS...It's easy to tell when an out of town show isn't doing well, says McCord, Herald Tribune. The press agent of the show provides the good out of town notices to the New York drama departments in a hurry. But he is nowhere to be seen when the show is going badly.

STAGEHAND STRIKE...Threatened strike by theatre stagehands on 24 hour notice dampens the start of the new theatrical public relations program notes Theatre News Weekly editorial. The paper feels it is unfortunate for all if a better situation were to be sacrificed because of a lack of judgment and/or willingness of a few to cooperate.

GUESS WHO...Blind item in Winchell's column tells story of critic on N.Y.daily who is on the spot. His editor has taken to attending first nights, and has his own opinions on the shows. These opinions have been inserted after the critic's review was handed in. Payoff is that critic, a relative of the founder of the paper, will some day be publisher. It it then expected he will demote the editor to the job of drama critic.

SMALL TOWN NYC...Herald Tribune editorial applauded Richard Rodgers speech at Hundred Year Association dinner for Rodgers and Hammerstein. They agreed that New York is essentially a small town filled with neighborliness and companionship.

YESTERDAY'S STARS...Where are the stars of yesterday living, asked Morehouse, WT&S. Maude Adams is at the Colony Club. Julia Marlow resides at the Plaza. Eleanor Robson lives on Fifth Avenue. Marie Doro has a home on East 70th Street. Margaret Anglin, Kitty Gordon, Violet Dale are also New Yorkers.

HART ON CRITICS...Moss Hart expressed two major complaints against critics at dinner forum of New School associates. Reviewers know "almost nothing about direction and pretty damned little about acting". They also leave no margin for error in condemning plays.

THEATRE LACKS IMAGINATION...The importance of imagination in the theatre has been minimized, John Gassner told the N.Y.State Community Theatre conference at Cornell University. Imagination is the essential feature of any art and the only thing that can save us from humdrum and mediocre thinking.

CALL IT SATIRE...Daily News editorial focused attention on "good natured but murderous" politic l satire in Call Me Madam. Paper hopes the play and later the movie, which features the "They Like Ike" song, will play a large role in the 1952 election campaign.

' Random Items '

Norman Bel Geddes plans year round theatre in New Rochelle...Biltmore Theatre reported for sale...Schribner's hunting graduates of Federal Theatre Project...Equity checking to see that all members of ABC TV Showcase, USA program receive full week salary...Wolcott Gibbs will stick to post as drama critic of New Yorker in spite of success of Season in the Sun, reports Sobol, Journal American.

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' Interview Round Up '

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ARTHUR KLEIN...Tickets Please producer discovered Al Jolson in 1901 as a boy singer on 14th Street, he recalled on MBS Sardis. He signed him to his first show in 1910. The producer started to write a book about the famous singer and some day hopes to finish it.

ESTELLE WINWOOD...Mrs. Warren's Profession star amazed Hawkins, WT&S, when she admitted she detested publicity. The actress was brought up with people who thought it simply was not nice. Personal contact, she believes, destroys the illusions built up on the stage.

FLORIDA FRIEBUS...Acting Chairmen of Equity Library Theatre outlined coming plans for season to ABC Mary Margaret McBride. Active theatre production group plans 25 plays at its Lenox Hill Playhouse, plus a series of four paid productions at De Witt Clinton Community Center in the Bronx. Actress got her interesting name from father who is direct descendant of Ponce de Leon.

HOWARD DA SILVA...Burning Bright actor believes the richest experience of his career were the days spent with the Federal Theatre Project, he told Pollock, Compass. He regrets that most playwrights seem to have discarded the new ideas and forms developed by the group.

JOHN PATRICK...The Curious Savage author has great respect for critics as a group, Rice, Post, discovered. He is not in sympathy with the usual vitriolic comments about critics. He feels that critics are among the inevitable. There is nothing that can be done about them.

MARTY MAY...Pardon My French comedian is a man of many rural talents WCBS Margaret Arlen learned. May lives in Carmel, New York, where his indoor and outdoor hobbies include plumbing, electric work and cementing. His career started as an altar boy in a Brooklyn church and lead to the star comic role in an Olsen and Johnson show.

LESLIE STORM...Black Chiffon author chatted with NBC Eleanor Roosevelt of the days when both were in England. Miss Storm traveled to an Irish naval hospital with her during the war. Her play, which was also a success in London with pretty much the same cast, had a hard time finding a suitable theatre in both London and New York.

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' Weekly Reviewers Rate the Plays '

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Arms and the Man-Arena, 10/15/50. Theatre-in-Round version of Shaw comedy won mild praise from Bron, Variety, and Gabriel, Cue, Both felt production was undistinguished but pleasant. They agreed with daily colleagues who wrote that only Sam Wanamaker and Will Kuluva were extracint full worth from the lines. Newsweek critic thought production was far below usual Arena standards.

The Gioconda Smile-Lyceum, 10/7/50. Lack of focus is major complaint Kerr, Commonweal, voiced against Aldous Huxley's play. Author couldn't make up mind which of two main characters his play was about. The movie made from the same story "A Woman's Vengeance" suffered from this same fault. Only George Relph in cast of play achieves any authority.

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' Chit Chat '

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Josephine Hull joined musicians union for role in The Golden State...Pardon Our French has 1162 props...Dramatists Guild filed appeal to reverse court decision that groups agreement with League of N.Y.Theatres violates anti-trust laws.